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A  
DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
*Curious Monuments and Antiquities*  
IN THE ISLAND OF  
**ICOLMKILL.** *Iona*  
OR THE ISLAND OF  
**ST. COLMAN-KILL.**

Also, an Account of the Island of STAFFA, where the rural Throne of the late King Fingal, is extant; being the Chief of the Heroes, so much admired by the Poets.

By a Gentleman who made the Tour of Europe, prior to this Description, in a Letter to a Friend. It is now published by the desire of several Gentlemen of Distinction, who reside in the Country; and given to the bearer JOHN M'CORMICK, upon account of his Misfortunes, to help him to support a small Family.



PRINTED FOR JOHN M'CORMICK, 1792.

A  
DESCRIPTION  
OF  
ICOLMKILL.



**I**N the course of my eastern travels, many of the personages of distinction to whom I had the honour of being introduced, were as curious to be informed of the Caledonian antiquities, as I was to be initiated in their manners and customs, as well as to view their several different edifices, structures, and monuments; which cannot but attract the attention of the curious, nay even the sentimental traveller.

The most of the personages, after the most complaisant and polite manner, shewed the most complaisant behaviour to me, my Governor and Linguist; indeed the generosity of many of them, inspired them so much into our favour, that they not only personally attended us, in viewing the antient structures, sculptures, cathedrals, &c. but endeavoured to give us the meaning of their erection, and what was meant by the sculptured figures on the monuments. In return of which favours, some of them requested that I should give them a description of the above Island, with the antiquities thereof, so much admired by foreigners, which I could not gratify at the time. And therefore at my return, went with a few companions in a barge or long-boat, from the Island of Mull to the foresaid Island, and took a short view thereof, guided by an honest man who lives on the spot, and seems to have an historical account of the meaning or emblems of the remaining figures undefaced, in the various fabrics in the said remote Island; and for perspicuity sake, are as follow.



St. Columbus, St. Oran, and St. Kenneth, three Brethren, were cousins to the king of Ireland, who were amongst the first converts to the Christian faith in that kingdom, fitted out a vessel called the Currachan, covered with cow hides; and brought with them artificers of all kinds, necessary for erecting temples for our Saviour's worship: and committing themselves to the direction of heaven, for being landed in some colony or desert where they might exercise their religion without persecution; And consequently, A. D. 550, arrived in the west end of the island, at a harbour called after the vessel Port Currachan till this day. The length of the ship was sixty-four feet, the breadth in proportion, and the demensions of the mould is hitherto preserved in earth and stone. At the place of landing, there are several heaps of small stones of different bulks within the sea mark; being a punishment inflicted by St. Columbus upon his transgressing disciples, and each heap was to be gathered in proportion to the sins they committed; and their submission was received by their patron as a sign of their penitence, and upon their confession, kneeling before him received absolution. There was lately found near this port, a large mass of marble, interspersed with such a variety of colours, and is in quality so fine when polished, as will in beauty and by its rarity exceed the Italian and Venetian marble; quarries are working at it in the mean time, and great hopes are conceived of its being a general ornament to the kingdom.

In the said year 550, St. Columbus, after consecrating the burying place with earth from Jerusalem and Rome, erected the palace of St. Oran, which is said to be the first Cathedral in Scotland, erected for our Saviour's worship. He also erected the magnificent and splendid church called St. Mary's, the remains of this building, is a real imitation of the plan now extant of the temple of Jerusalem, In a lane or entry near the place of worship, is a building called the Place of Contemplation; and betwixt the said place and the temple is interred St. Columbus; his monument is not now visible. South from St. Oran's church, are buried forty-eight kings from different nations, with inscriptions on their tombs in different languages, such as, Hebrew,

Greek, Latin, Danish, Irish, &c. The arms of their kingdom are beautifully engraved upon their tombs, and the most of them have the effigies of the monarchs drawn at full length, armed with swords, targets, and some with spears of an antient construction, engraven upon marble stones with admirable taste. Also M'Donald king of the Western Isles; the inscription upon his tomb cannot be read. It is said 900 cows at three merks scots each, were consumed at his burrial.

Near the royal tombs is interred the Abbot M'Kinnon, with his effigy drawn at full length to the life, with lions supporting his head and feet, a crook in his hand as a shepherd over his flock arrayed also in his altar robes; he has a star on the back of his left hand, another on his breast, a ring on one of his fingers, directing two of his fingers to the star, an angel on each side of his head, and another on the crown thereof; the inscription on his tomb is in the Hebrew language, which was lately translated into English by a visiting gentleman. Here lies John M'Kinnon late Abbot of Iona, who died in the year, 1343. May the most High God have mercy on his soul, Amen.

Abbot M'Kenzie's effigy is drawn in the same manner, but the inscription on his tomb, as well as on the tombs of other four Abbots, are so defaced that they cannot be read. There are also in different places here, the tombs of the Highland chieftians, the coats of arms of their families, and mottos, with their warlike apparelling, &c. some inscriptions are still visible and legible. Here is also the tomb of Paul Campbell, Treasurer to the king of Scotland; he was son to the ancestor of the family of Argyle; a large two handed sword, with the figure of the coins circulating in the time, are engraven upon the stone; but the inscriptions thereon are quite defaced. Also, the tomb of the famous Dr. Beaton; his elegy is visible and in the English language, below his armorial bearing, viz.

*Behold he falls by the dart of  
iniquitous death,  
Who often delivered others from their complaints;  
Glory be to God alone.*



Within the Nunnery, on the south-west of the village, are interred different Nuns; this building is a real piece of architecture, and one tomb in particular cannot but attract the attention of the curious, *viz.* The tomb of the lady Abbess, her effigy in full length is drawn in the most lively manner; she is in a praying posture having uplifted hands, her eyes open, an angel on each side of her head, playing on a harp, her lap dog at the skirt of her garment, the moon above her head, and a comb for her hair. Fronting the lady Abbess on the same stone, is the Virgin Mary with the Babe at her breast, a crown on his head, above which is the moon and stars; with the effigy of the lady Abbess on the middle of the tomb, praying and saying, O holy Virgin pray for me. The inscription on the tomb is as follows, *viz.*

*Here lies the Divine ANNA,*

*The Daughter of Donald, son of Charles, late Abbot of Iona, who died in the year 1540; whose soul we commit to Abraham's bosom.*

And the said Nunnery is encircled with several cathedrals, monasteries, and other edifices built in the Gothic manner. There are many other tombs with crosses in the island, having different languages; the chief cross called St. Brandan's, is now the cross of Campbelton; and the bell of St. Mary's chapel, is in one of the steeples of Glasgow.

The following figures are still visible in the Island.

1st Figure, The sin of ingratitude, represented by three ruffian brethren, robbing their nurse of a cow, one holding the cow by the horns, the second by the tail, the third attempting to kill her, and the woman behind, with open mouth and uplifted hands, appealing to heaven for protection.

2d Figure, Upon the right side of the place of contemplation, is the figure of an Arch-angel, with beam and balance, weighing the souls of men; the Devil crouching behind to catch either beam or balance, if found wanting in their separate functions.

3d Figure, Our first parents Adam, and Eve, in the garden of Eden, standing on opposite sides of the tree of knowledge, having aprons of leaves, and hands across covering their nakedness; the Arch-angel, with sword in hand, turning them out of the garden, and threatening destruction; the promised Saviour appearing for their preservation, and bruising the head of the serpent.

4th Figure, Our Saviour riding to Jerusalem upon an ass, and a great multitude following him, praying for his blessing.

5th Figure, The band of soldiers apprehending our Saviour, and Peter cutting off Malchus' ear.

6th Figure, Samson killing the lion.

7th Figure, John the Baptist beheaded, his wounds gushing with blood; the executioner holding the head in his hand, the daughter of Herodias receiving it from the executioner, and John lying on the ground beheaded.

8th Figure, Is a cross lately found below the ground near the Nunnery, upon which is engraven very naturally, our Saviour crucified, in the very manner described in the scriptures; and is fixed in a standing posture near the Nunnery.

There were many streets and walks leading to the west of the village, the chief street was called the King's street. About the whole fabricks there was a fresh lake, surrounded with a fine grove of birch-wood, which made the place very agreeable.

In the middle of the island are two hills, the one is called Angel-hill; there being the remains of a place of worship to be seen on the top of each of them. It is said that at Whitsunday, the Priests rode on white horses, clothed in white robes to the said places of worship.

The island is about three miles in length, and one in breadth, and is very fertile in grain and grass; and in property belongs to the Duke of Argyle; there are 300 people residing therein. The sea surrounding, is richly stored with Cod, Ling and other white fish. And there are plenty of sea fowls, such as wild Geese and Ducks, about the shore. They buried their Males separate from the Females, till within these forty years past.



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S T A F F A.

THREE leagues north from Icolmkill, is the famous Island of Staffa. It is supported upon pillars in the middle of the ocean; the pillars are of a mixed marble, and no marble containing such a variety of brilliant colours, was ever discovered in Britain. The Island is square, and extends about three quarters of a mile; the subterraneous part thereof is so naturally arched and decorated, that it exceeds the most exquisite performance of the greatest artists in the world. There is a melodious cave in the island, any music played or sung therein, will sound more melodious than an organ. The rocks towards the sea seem as if they were polished by artists of great taste; the pebbles on the shore have every appearance of beautiful pearls. There is only one family in the Island; In stormy weather the house not only shakes, but even the very kettles on the fire. There is further a greater curiosity, a barge under sails and in low water, will with ease proceed sixty yards into the said cave; and at the distance of a league, when passing the same in dark nights, visible, sparkling like diamonds, will cast a lustre at a great distance. On the top of the Island there is a beautiful natural seat of marble, resembling an easy chair, which is said to be king Fingal's throne; and contiguous thereto, there are three pyramids resembling a sugar loaf, which beautifies the royal seat.

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About 100 leagues south east from Staffa, lies the remains of a most antient Cathedral; it was erected by one of the kings of Ireland, who for his piety and distinguished zeal, in propagating the Christian religion, acquired the name of St. Cormaig. And the island where the Cathedral is, is called Keil Mhich O'Chormaig, (signifying M'Cormick's burial place,) and Eiloun m'or mhic O'Chormaig, (signifying M'Chormaig, (signifying M'Cormick's great Island.) The temple was built much after the plan

of St. Colman Kill; there are a variety of beautiful grave stones, with obliterated inscriptions in the burial place. The inscription on the Saint's tomb was visible about 60 years ago, viz. Cormaig ulfad Righ Eiren (signifying in the Irish language; long bearded Cormaig king of Ireland;) his chief priest is interred in a tomb beside him. The most of the Highland Colonies, were peopled by emigrants from Ireland; and especially the following clans are of Irish descent, viz. M'Donalds, M'Dugalds, M'Leans, M'Lachlans, M'Cormaigs, M'Oheanaigs, M'Leods, M'Feet, and M' Callums, &c.

Cormaig ulfad Righ Eiren is buried in Icolmkill, ulfad (signifies long bearded.) There has been a popish progenitor of the name in the south end of the Ross of Knapdale, from whom the place of worship got the name, and an Island at the end of the point, viz. Kill Mhichd O'Chormaig, and Elan More, Mhichd O'Chormaig. All the Colonies of the Highlands, came mostly from Ireland, Campbells, M'Donalds, M'Dougals, M'Carbries, M'Cormaigs, M'Neils, M'o'Sheunugs, M'Mhicuhs, &c. Mac-Leods, M'Feet, M'Corguidals, M'Callums, from Denmark; Mac-Kenzies, Frasers and Gordons, from France.

The first Religion in Scotland was called Druidism, in Earle, (Druinnich,) they worshiped the Sun, till Icolmkill, came from Ireland, who was a Disciple of John the apostle and the preachers were called Culdich i. e. Colleres Dei, worshippers of God.

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